

Johnson Gives State of the City Address

By JFP Staff

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Kenya Hudson

During his State of the City address this afternoon, Jackson Mayor Harvey Johnson Jr. touted his administration's progress over the last year and unveiled a "Jobs for Jacksonians" initiative to help citizens find information about job opportunities in the city. Read the text of his speech below, and read tomorrow's JFP Daily for an analysis of his speech.

Thank you Reverend Sam Gleese for the invocation. To President Bluntson and members of the Jackson City Council, other elected officials, City employees, citizens of Jackson and friends, it is my pleasure to welcome each of you to the 2011 State of the City Address. I would also like to thank my wife Kathy for being here today and for her continued support. I appreciate you so much and I love you dearly. (Applause)

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I would also like to recognize Primus Wheeler and thank him for allowing us to use this venue today for this very important update to Jackson's citizens. The Jackson Medical Mall has become a showcase in our community and a celebrated model of redevelopment and community reinvestment. The Medical Mall Foundation under the leadership of Dr. Aaron Shirley has also reached beyond the walls of this building and planted seeds of rebirth and renewal in the surrounding community. There is development occurring all around us, providing commerce to this neighborhood, providing research and development opportunities for the growing and celebrated medical community, and perhaps most of all, building and underscoring a sense of pride across Jackson. I would also like to recognize Dan Meyers, the owner of the Save A Lot that is being constructed just outside and Ed Powers the manager of AMR which is also constructing a new facility just on the other side of the mall. (Applause)

The City got on board fifteen years ago and showed faith in this facility by agreeing to be one of the first tenants. Look how far we've come, and we are just getting started!

This month marks the midway point of my third term as Mayor of the city of Jackson, and I am pleased to report that the state of the city of Jackson is good.

In the past two years we have laid the important groundwork that will allow our city to move forward to meet our challenges and continue to enjoy more economic development opportunities, put more citizens to work, provide greater care for our elderly and young people, and continue to reduce crime.

One of the most important keys in our city's success is providing the best quality services our citizens expect and deserve. I have put a team of directors in place who work tirelessly to improve our City and to be more efficient and optimize our limited resources. These directors oversee hundreds of city employees who show up for work at all hours of the day and night to serve and protect, repair and replace, clean up and construct and to make a better Jackson for us all! (Applause)

At this time, I would like to recognize the Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office and the Chief Administrative Office staff, and the Department Directors, and personally thank them for their tireless work for our citizens. I would ask that they please stand.

In the coming weeks, I will propose a budget to the Jackson City Council that will be balanced, and will reflect the frugal, cost-saving approach my administration uses to manage taxpayers' dollars. And this budget will lay out a path forward that will allow us to live within our means while not laying off or furloughing employees. (Applause)

We are continuing our "right-sizing" approach to management to make the necessary adjustments to the way we deliver services to optimize results, becoming more efficient with our resources and more responsive to the needs of citizens.

And speaking of responsiveness, I'm very pleased we launched our 3-1-1 system this past spring! This easy to remember number allows citizens to call in non-emergency service requests from filling a pothole to water breaks, and they can track the progress of their requests. Nearly 9,000 citizens have either called in or logged their service request online. We are working to make the system even better in the future!

Initiatives like 3-1-1 will assist us in this and future budget years to be more accountable and to continue to right-size.

Our sales tax revenue is projected to be over \$700,000 above what we budgeted this year. This is great news! (Applause) This is due to the very strong development and pro-business friendly goals we work towards day in and day out. I have said this before and I think that it bears repeating, that the city of Jackson has a clear track record of supporting the business community. (Applause)

In fact, the city of Jackson makes more resources available to accommodate the needs of businesses than any other municipality in the state!

Just this morning, I attended an event held by one of our greatest corporate partners - Entergy. They announced they were purchasing the old Duke Energy Plant in the Northwest Industrial Park. When placed in full operation, this \$200 million facility will retain twenty jobs and bring \$5 million to Jackson's tax rolls. (Applause)

This is on top of the \$20-plus million Entergy has invested in Jackson by with their data and operations centers recently constructed. As a matter of fact, that operations center was relocated from New Orleans to Jackson! I applaud Entergy's continued confidence in the Capital City! (Applause)

Jackson continues to enjoy major development all around town. We have examples of important public projects such as the James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and Roy K. Moore Federal Building on the Echelon Parkway that was recently completed. This \$29 million project is actually a privately owned, tax-paying building being leased by the FBI. Major public projects include the recently opened Federal Courthouse and the McCoy Federal Building being renovated. These public projects represent nearly \$200 million spent in downtown Jackson.

In fact, we have enjoyed a boon of development from the Standard Life building renovations, to the Sleep Inn Hotel, to the Vowell's Market in South Jackson to the major \$6 million Irby expansion on State Street.

And we have more in the pipeline, such as the Old Capitol Green Project, the continuation of University Place development near Jackson State, the School for the Blind Development, Fondren enhancements, the Farish Street Entertainment District, a flood control project that will eventually give us better access to the Pearl River, and yes, a Convention Center Hotel! (Applause)

We finished the award-winning Highway 80 Economic Development Strategy and we will be moving forward with important land use plans to encourage residential and commercial development along the corridor. And the city of Jackson made another statement of faith last week when we broke ground on a new \$6.8 million JATRA facility on Highway 80 at Valley Street. (Applause)

We are certain this is going to spur more development, and when we move more than 200 city employees into the Metrocenter Mall this fall, we are going to see even more interest and activity along this important corridor. Highway 80 is making a comeback! (Applause)

Just yesterday one of the most exciting announcements this year took place right here with the roll out of the Mississippi Healthcare Corridor project. This comprehensive approach will continue to put Jackson on the map as a world-class healthcare city with development all along Woodrow Wilson Blvd. that will accommodate medical facilities, research labs, housing opportunities and more! We are excited to see this take shape, and have no doubt about it, this concept has my full support! (Applause)

And speaking of the medical community, the City is working with Baptist Health Services on a tax increment financing agreement to support their \$38 million office complex on North State Street and, for the first time, a TIF agreement will contain provisions to hire Jacksonians in the construction project. (Applause)

Ladies and gentlemen, I made a promise to put people to work and that's exactly what I'm going to do. (Applause)

My administration's initiative - Jobs for Jacksonians - contains a number of effective programs that we use to help our citizens become employed. The more Jacksonians we can ensure are working, the stronger our families and neighborhoods will be and eventually the stronger our City will be.

We continue to support small businesses with two grant programs. Our storefront and small business development grant programs provide much needed capital to businesses to make improvements or purchase equipment to open or expand and improve. I'm happy to report that we provided over \$400,000 in grants to businesses last year and we created or retained over 400 jobs for our citizens. (Applause)

Our grant programs were recognized as a best practice by the U.S. Conference of Mayors this year and we're going to continue to use this program to support our small businesses and create jobs!

Our Jobs for Jacksonians initiative, has allowed us to hire senior aides, providing jobs for older citizens. We've hired 200 young people this summer for the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program, but what's even more exciting and encouraging is that the business community hired an additional 125 young people as part of the program. We hope to build upon this success! (Applause)

We successfully launched a transitional jobs program this spring geared toward homeless individuals living in shelters and transitional housing. The program's purpose and goal was to afford individuals a second chance - no another chance.

Thirteen agencies partnered with the City. I am happy to report eleven of the fifteen participants are either employed with the non-profit agency they were paired with, or have found employment in the private sector. They are no longer living in shelters and have moved into their own apartments. One young lady has recently purchased her own home, while another participant is rehabbing a house given to him. (Applause)

We are working through our Fresh Start program to place ex-offenders in jobs. Now I hope you believe an individual who is gainfully employed is more likely to be a law-abiding citizen than one who is on the street, without a job and without any hope for a job. (Applause)

The WIN mobile job center sets up for several hours prior to our Ward meetings, allowing local residents to search for jobs and to take advantage of the other services offered. I applaud the Mississippi Department Employment Security for partnering with the city of Jackson to avail our citizens of this resource!

We are not stopping there. I am happy to announce today that we have set up a one stop telephone number for Jackson citizens to call to find out about these and other job programs.

Residents can call 601-961-4JOB and we will route them to the appropriate service provider and take their information for our job registry that we will use for these programs. We will also try to match them with those companies who do business or have contracts with the city of Jackson.

We are serious about our Jobs for Jacksonians Initiative and we're going to make our best effort to put our citizens to work!

So remember 601-961-4JOB (4562).

We are addressing important infrastructure challenges here in the city of Jackson. We've continued to replace critical bridge structures, like the TV Road Bridge, Dixon Road Bridge and Cedars of Lebanon Bridge with bond money. And we've just applied for grant funding to determine what type of action we are going to take to rehab or replace the bridge over the railroad yard along Woodrow Wilson Blvd., just down the street.

And I'm very pleased to announce that work on relocating utility lines for the Fortification Street project started last week. We grow more confident every day that significant construction of this long awaited multi-million dollar road re-construction project will begin in earnest this fall.

We are also moving on other important street projects such as the Jesse Mosley Drive project that will provide an improved entrance to Smith Robertson Museum; the Lynch Street Project which will provide the same roadway treatment as the Dr. Robert Smith Parkway from Wiggins to Highway 80. We will also be moving on the next Phase of West Countyline Road, right in front of Tougaloo College and you will begin to see movement on the Capitol Street Two-Waying Project in the coming year as well. And this summer we will begin a citywide street repaving program. (Applause)

Improving our infrastructure, particularly water and sewer, is a major priority. The issue still remains that there is a critical need in the city of Jackson, as in most urban areas across the nation, to garner resources without digging deeper into the pockets of our ratepayers.

Over the past year, we've been working through the process.

We reached an agreement with the Mississippi Development Authority to utilize \$6 million in bond funds to make improvements to the water system in the downtown area. We are moving forward with the design and will begin implementing this improvement project by the end of this year. This will include major water line replacement and the installation of a two million gallon water tank to support the downtown area and the Capitol Complex as well as West Jackson.

We have let a contract for the installation of a 48" transmission line that will allow us to abandon the well system, which is not as reliable as our surface water supply. We will bid the remaining segments of this project by the end of the year.

We are in the final stages of negotiations for the 54" transmission line that will connect the O.B. Curtis Water Plant to the J.W. Fewell Plant, and increase our water supply reliability.

We are moving forward with the Maddox Road Booster Station and the addition of a major water tank in the Highway 18 area of South Jackson that will increase capacity and will also support our efforts to abandon the well system.

My fellow Jacksonians, these projects represent a \$35 million commitment the city of Jackson has made this year in improving our water system.

But this is just the tip of the iceberg.

What is going to be extremely costly are the very critical needs we have for our wastewater system.

We've already been sanctioned by our State regulatory agency and we must spend \$29 million over the next two years on certain improvements to our wastewater system.

Over the past year we've also been in negotiations with the Department of Justice and the Environmental Protection Agency on improvements that are being mandated by the Clean Water Act.

These negotiations have been going well, but we anticipate a price tag of several hundred million dollars when we sign the Consent Decree.

Paying for all the improvements will be a tremendous challenge. That's why we asked lawmakers during the the 2011 session of the Legislature to revise the language of the 2009 local option sales tax legislation to make the legislation more palatable to Jackson voters. (Applause)

Although we appreciate the efforts of the Legislature, particularly our local delegation, for attempting to address our concerns, the final legislation really does not improve the City's position in the decision making process for the expenditure of the public funds being proposed by this legislation.

Unfortunately, the legislation places the way these funds are expended in the hands of an appointed commission.

Moreover, the ten person commission would only have three people who have gone through the Mayor/Council appointment process.

I believe the citizens of Jackson would want their elected officials to be more involved in the expenditures of the estimated \$15 million a year. Particularly since the commission would be in place for 20 years. (Applause)

We must continue to work together to ensure that we have the necessary resources to take on huge infrastructure problems. We've reinstituted our Water and Sewer Citizens Advisory Committee, and these Jackson residents are meeting with us as we work on these important infrastructure issues and they will be helping us share information with the community over the coming months.

We revamped our efforts to fight blight this year. We have instituted a hearing officer who hears dilapidated property and unkempt lots cases. This judge can make determinations on these cases, that include placing fines and fees for cleaning lots and tearing down houses on the tax bills of property owners. We appreciate the legislature for responding for our request for this type of authority. (Applause)

We are already seeing that this change is making property owners more responsive in keeping their properties up, but we are going to redouble our efforts to rid neighborhoods of burnt out structures and ensure that we hold regular hearing dates to clear out the existing back log. (Applause)

This past year our Senior Services Division improved the well-being of senior citizens by providing over 53,000 hot, noon-time meals and a myriad of activities at its seven Senior Centers and two nutrition sites.

Over 60,000 meals were provided to homebound seniors and over 31,000 trips were made to ensure seniors are transported to needed services.

Right now we have 642 young people who are participating in our Summer Enhancement Program at our city's gyms, community centers and at JPS school sites. And next month, we invite Jackson Public School Students and their parents to the 2nd Annual First Day Program at the Jackson Convention Center Complex. First Day aims to send our public school students back to school with a great community celebration showing support from the entire city. Join us August 13th.

Combatting crime is a top priority and the Jackson Police Department is making great strides in not only lowering the crime rate, but in making sure our citizens feel safe.

The Jackson Police Department graduated its 47th recruit class this year and we are gearing up for another in October. I am committed to having more police recruit classes graduate every year. Our goal of 500 officers can be met if we get more aggressive with the recruitment process.

We are also working towards increasing our reserve officer pool. Our reserve officers are instrumental in supplementing the police department with more manpower to address crime.

We have Mr. Porter Ross in the audience who has been a reserve officer for more than thirty years.

Ladies and gentlemen, crime is down in the city of Jackson. Violent crime is down 17% and property crime is down 2% this year over last. In order to continue this trend, it is not only going to take the men and women of the Jackson Police Department, it is also going to take every one of us being the eyes and ears in our neighborhoods, house by house, street by street.

There is a great program called the Citizens Police Academy that can show you all the ins and outs of JPD, and get you prepared to work WITH US to fight crime. Hundreds of citizens have already been through the academy and I urge you to join the next class this fall.

The Jackson Police Department continues to invest in important technology, such as license plate readers, computers in patrol cars, electronic fingerprint readers and we will be announcing some more important technological investments in the near future. We need to continue to invest in 21st century approaches to fighting crime. I'm committed to it.

We have important partnerships with other local, state and federal law enforcement agencies in combatting criminal elements, particularly those involving the sale of drugs in Jackson. I applaud Chief Rebecca Coleman and her command staff for sending the message to these law enforcement agencies that the Jackson Police Department is ready to cooperate and to work together!

Just this year, we bolstered our partnership with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the U.S. Attorney's Office to combat violent crimes in the city of Jackson involving guns. These are the types of initiatives that will help us continue to turn the corner on crime in Jackson.

We've created the Special Operations Division that will oversee some of these important partnerships, precinct five and other operations that will allow us to dispatch resources to hot spots.

COMSTAT allows us to look at where crime is occurring street by street to ensure we put our resources exactly where they are needed to tackle the problem. Many have commented on JPD's increased visibility. COMSTAT, along with concerted, targeted efforts, allows us to continue to be more visible in our neighborhoods, shopping centers and on our major thoroughfares.

And we have added more beats to Precinct 1, and we will add more beats to Precinct 4 next.

The fire department is also holding a recruit class this fall. The recruits will receive dual firefighter and EMT training during the class. (Applause) This comes just months after the department's largest promotional ceremony in its history. More than 120 candidates were promoted to Fire Captains, Lieutenant Driver Operators and Relief Driver Operators.

We commend Chief Raymond McNulty and the Jackson Fire Department for the work they do and for maintaining a Class 3 fire insurance rating. This is the best rating in the entire state of Mississippi! (Applause)

My administration remains committed to being open. We've continued our successful One on One sessions before regular City Council Meetings. We continue to travel to a different ward every other month to hear your concerns and to bring reports on important city projects and services. Today, I'm pleased to announce a new initiative to expand citizen participation even more. In the coming weeks we will be forming the first Mayor's Citizens Cabinet.

The idea behind this initiative is to have representatives from the community who are willing to bring concerns and ideas from the larger community to the administration, as well as to assist us in addressing and communicating solutions. We've just started, but I have great expectations for this new level of citizen involvement!

I am also creating the Capital City Ambassadors Program this year. We will be selecting individuals from across Mississippi to come to their Capital City and learn about the wonderful things that are going on, to enjoy our attractions and to see the progress that we are making here in Jackson. We need to begin telling our own story, and we are going to use this Ambassadors Program to do just that. (Applause)

And for Jacksonians who want to see all the progress we are making, I urge you to join us on a Pride Ride around Jackson. We re-launched this program early this summer and we are going to continue every other month touring our own residents around their hometown, showcasing the great successes in our community. I am the tour guide and I look forward to seeing you on one of the tours soon. You won't be disappointed. (Applause)

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope it is clear to all who are listening today and for everyone who might be reading about this tomorrow and for anyone who wants to tell SOMEONE what I'm talking about when I say that I am proud to live in Jackson, Mississippi - our state's capital city.

Sometimes we need to remind folks that we are the Capital City! We need to let folks know that our city is the center of culture, healthcare, education and commerce for the entire state of Mississippi! We need to speak with pride about the fact our local economy is growing and the development projects around downtown and around town in Jackson. And my goodness our people, our hospitable, our hard-working, our engaged, our optimistic, our charitable citizens - tell them about our people!

We need to extend our arms outside the borders of our neighborhoods, past the stop signs at the end of our streets and even across county lines and share the love of Jackson with all who will hear it.

Thank you all for coming.

God Bless you and God bless the City of Jackson.

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